

2. Stendhal, *The Red and the Black*

I In an attempt to understand that moment in our past when Romanticism formed the taste of the reading public and prepared the way for our current taste, I shall discuss four classic novels, Stendhal's *The Red and the Black*, Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, and Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. All of these books are post-Rousseauian, that is, they breathe the air of a world newly articulated by Rousseau. Their authors all read Rousseau and were both attracted and repelled by him in varying degrees—from Austen, who most easily resisted his spell, to Tolstoy, who was an almost unqualified enthusiast. Their relationships to Rousseau are not as well known as they should be because his once fatal charms have faded and his traces are less recognizable. But for more than a century readers of novels were in the grip of his passionate vision of the way men and women could be together. The only figure today comparable in power to Rousseau, as is recognized more readily now, is Nietzsche, and even he hardly rivals Rousseau.

I do not mean to deny the individuality of the great artists who wrote these novels, nor do I want to appear to violate the aesthetic integrity of the books by reducing the writers' vision to a formula of intellectual history originating in Rousseau. However, even though Stendhal and Austen have almost contrary intellectual, moral, and artistic tastes, they share certain views about what counts that were not shared by earlier or later writers. To both Stendhal and Austen, the intimate contact between one man and one woman seems suffi-

cient to attract readers and hold their attention without much more being added.

Some critics may reproach my undertaking because it insists on the decisive influence of a philosopher on the work of artists. The old New Critics were the first to take this tack, overreacting with the laudable intention of rescuing the texts themselves from doctrinaire intellectual historians. They have been seconded by the newest new critics who have a prejudice against reason and insist that artists cannot be understood to be decisively influenced by the reasoning of philosophers. These reproaches are usually made against those who bring in thinkers whose influence has been exhausted and therefore now belong to the domain of scholarly eunuchs. But it is essential to underline that Rousseau was more potent for thoughtful and sensitive men and women in the nineteenth century than either Marx or Freud is for us. And the fact that these reproaches are themselves doctrinaire can be seen from the way almost all such critics naturally refer to Marx and Freud when treating contemporary writers. This does not mean that all contemporary writers are the same, or that one properly understands or appreciates them by saying that they are Marxists or Freudians. It only means that today artists swim in an ocean discovered by Marx or Freud, and that everybody after Marx or Freud is moved in one direction or another by their tides. It is very rare that a serious person can avoid confronting the thought most important in his times and even rarer that someone can fully overcome those influences. We would not criticize someone for thinking that a poet who lived after the foundation of Christianity was influenced by it, or that his understanding of what counts for man might be different from that of a Greek or Roman poet. Why not, then, attribute something of that power to a philosopher? Somehow in our perspective religion is aesthetically potent and respectable, but not philosophy. Rousseau, however, understood himself to be a rival of Jesus and his writings to be a rival of the Bible, and his claim was accepted by many. Rousseau's new world is one where the attachment of men and women became more central than it ever was before or after, and these writers elaborated that attachment with unrivaled genius, just as the Christian writers carefully examined conscience as it never had been examined before or after. Just as there is a wonderful variety of forms of Christian faith, each interesting in itself but also not to be understood without recognizing the common inspiration of Christianity, there is a similar variety of Rousseauans. This does not detract from any of them, and each must be addressed on his or her own ground and with perfect openness to

what he or she says. The phenomenon man appears to reveal itself by way of the interpretations of it. The artists, who of course can themselves be such interpreters, usually begin from the deepest interpretations that are available and seem plausible to them.

As against the most current literary hobbyhorses, I conclude that writers have intentions and knew what they were doing, because they thought so themselves. I cannot arrogate to myself the position superior to my writers that is assumed by so many contemporary critics. This seems to be a misapprehension of the critic's place in the rank order of being, and it also takes away so much of the fun of reading. There is no reason why an artist cannot use his or her genius to present a view of the best way of life and the best human beings. There is nothing anti-artistic about such an endeavor, and the artists' creation of expressions or representatives of that way of life surpasses the persuasive power of almost all the philosophers.

II

Stendhal, on the face of it, would seem to be an artist very far from the spirit of the artist who gave us *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. Stendhal is a shameless immoralist, a public atheist, and his heroes are conscienceless adulterers or seducers who live with their beloveds without concern for marriage. And his style is so very different. Stendhal is rapid, dry, and ironic, with an apparent contempt for sentimentality. There are none of the effusions of a Saint-Preux in his works and none of the edification. The action of his books gallops. And there is a distaste for equality, which is Rousseau's fundamental principle. Stendhal's books are written for the happy few and evoke rare exaltations of rare persons. Finally, he expresses regret about the influence that Rousseau had over him. Of course this regret is also an admission of that influence. Stendhal also says that his *On Love* is written for the kind of reader who can understand *Emile*.¹ This cynic was, I believe, one of the better students in Rousseau's school and reveals his teaching more clearly than do more unabashedly Romantic writers such as Hugo or Scott.

Stendhal's cynicism is a consequence of his agreement with Rousseau that the bourgeois has conquered the world and is the most contemptible of beings. Stendhal does not look to revolution to correct this situation, but his art deals with the way in which finer tempers can live within it. This whole novelistic world is, in one way or another, incessantly about the opposition between the artist and

bourgeois society. Stendhal's utter contempt for public opinion, a contempt that he repeatedly directs against the United States as the true home of public opinion, could be interpreted as the expression of an aristocratic preference. He does not hesitate to prefer corrupt old heroes to fresh and vigorous democratic America because in America everybody is the slave of shopkeepers' opinions—and there is no opera in America.² But actually he is arguing for an Emilean self-legislation, accessible to even the poorest of men, rather than for the haughtiness of the old regime.

Julien Sorel, the hero of *The Red and the Black*, is a nobody whose passions alone separate him from the petty world of the bourgeoisie. He is the son of a coarse peasant who has shrewdly parlayed a sawmill into a small fortune. The beautiful, sensitive Julien is treated like an unwanted changeling by his father and his brutish brothers. Julien hates them all and lives in a private world of imaginations of success, corroded by envy of the rich. His vaulting ambition distinguishes him from everyone else we encounter in the novel. He represents a heroic aspiration no longer to be found in his contemporaries. This is an irreducible fact, a difference of nature, and it is what makes him interesting to Stendhal. In the midst of the society supposedly founded on the natural equality of man there are special kinds of genius deprived of proper vehicles for self-expression. Julien's passion, his anger, and his imprudence are what make him attractive when others only calculate and use everything, including nobility and religion, for the sake of comfort and petty distinction. Julien is incapable of adjusting to this life. His story is his education in what really counts, and he dies young but superior in all the sentiments of the heart. This is clearly a Rousseauian theme, the superior young man whose pride is wounded by everything he encounters but who refuses to be broken by the system. The problem of modern man, as Rousseau tells us, is the emergence of a type of human being whose only concern is property, to be used in the first place for self-preservation, in the second for comfort, and finally for the satisfaction of vanity. There was once an aristocracy that had higher motives, but it exists now only as a reminiscence. And though religion once elevated the soul, it has now been overcome by a Jesuitism that is an imitation of the bourgeoisie. Society as a whole gives witness only to the unjust power of money. There is no relation whatsoever between position and desert. Nothing could be further from the American view that liberal society largely gives witness to the success of equal opportunity. In Stendhal's world no one can make a claim of justice, and all parties are either trying to hold on to

advantages acquired or trying to wrest them from those who possess them. Everything is competition and intrigue. There may be ideas of justice, but they do not reflect the actual condition of society. Therefore society's laws and morality have no claim on our loyalty, and the one who manipulates them most skillfully to his advantage solicits admiration. This is pretty much the condition felt so strongly by the youth Jean-Jacques when he encounters the Savoyard Vicar.

A reader of Rousseau's *Confessions*, Julien imitates Rousseau's wounded pride that rebels against the system, but through insisting on being recognized by it he makes himself a part of it. When Julien is hired as a tutor in the house of the rich mayor of Verrières, he makes the same demand, without understanding precisely why, that Rousseau made in similar circumstances,³ that he not be required to wear a uniform like a lackey and that he dine with the masters and not with the servants (I.5).^{*} As with so many young people in this new nineteenth century, Julien is a reader who gets his instruction about what life is like and how to behave from books. He reads, of course, only a tiny number of books, the real classics for everyday use that take the place of the lost authority of the Bible. As for so many of the most interesting French of his century, Julien's Bibles are Rousseau's works and Napoleon's *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*. Stendhal underlines his point by making Julien know the real Bible, especially the Gospels, letter-perfect, by heart, in Latin. This means that he does not take a word of it seriously but uses it as a tool for his hypocrisy to advance himself in a society that is hopelessly and incurably hypocritical. Julien is by instinct an unbeliever, and his real scriptures keep him ever mindful of Rousseau's analysis of modern society and the grandeur of Napoleon's ambition, which conquered that society.

Napoleon is much more Julien's hero than is Rousseau, and Stendhal reflects the sad awareness that dominated Continental literature throughout the nineteenth century and affected not only literary expressions of the human situation but also those of philosophy and sociology. Max Weber, when he spoke of the charismatic leader, really meant Napoleon and lamented his disappearance. This was the Continent's mood. The last of the heroes has disappeared forever, and we must make do in this dull world without him. This post-Napoleonic pathos plays an enormous role in Romanticism and still affects the categories by which we interpret society. Napoleon's

^{*} All parenthetical citations in this chapter are to part and chapter of Stendhal's *The Red and the Black*.

vast ambition and his splendid and unabashed pursuit of glory made the world young again and gave the opportunity for the Julien Sorels to play a role on the world stage worthy of them, a role earned by military courage rather than the moneymaker's ruses. Stendhal's most beautiful description of this new youth of the world is to be found in the opening pages of *The Charterhouse of Parma* when the French conquer Milan. The hero of that book, Fabrice del Dongo, is the illegitimate offspring of this conquest; his character and loves are Napoleonic and yet teach how one must live in a post-Napoleonic time. One might say Napoleon is more important for Stendhal than is Rousseau, but the disappearance of Napoleon means only that the victory of the bourgeoisie predicted by Rousseau has come to pass. Stendhal is like those novelists who expressed the mood of the decline of the West, which appeared to be a consequence of the First World War. Nietzsche, however, had already announced that decline forty years before, and the First World War only confirmed his announcement. The disappointments following the French Revolution and Napoleon's Empire served only to confirm Rousseau's articulation of the forces that would move modern society. Thinkers like Rousseau and Nietzsche are prescient, and it takes a half century for events and lesser men to catch up with them. They saw much more and predicted much better than did, for example, Marx; and Tocqueville's remarkable clarity about the future was drawn from his reading of Rousseau.

But, however much the shadow of Napoleon affects the scenery of this drama, Stendhal, like Rousseau, does not so much regret lost heroes as use his loss to discover the highest vocation of man, love. The hard Stendhal represents more unequivocally than any of the other writers we are going to treat, and perhaps more than any other writer, confidence in the redemptive power of love. This is what is paradoxical about Stendhal: he really believes in the possibility of love. He has no sympathy for the charms of the profligate Don Juan, who lacks, according to him, the intense experience of the passionate, exclusive love on which one stakes one's life.⁴ But this idealistic view of love seems to clash with Stendhal's unvarnished realism about the deeds and the motives of men. Actually, this love is the standpoint, replacing the aristocratic and religious standpoints that used to serve this function, from which he is able to judge this world so severely. The spirit of Rousseau is, willy-nilly, in Stendhal's blood.

Thus Stendhal, in spite of his apparent lack of didacticism and his concentration on the sentiments of his characters' hearts without any

rhetoric or philosophizing about the cosmic scene within which they are experienced, actually does show us all the fundamental alternatives that face a serious man as he saw them. With a few deft strokes he paints the alternatives, Rousseau and liberal society, the Bible and the religious life, the peasant, the bourgeois, the aristocrat, Napoleon and the classical hero. Each of the individuals in his book has an education, a defective education, that is a pale reflection of the great choices and their most persuasive modern advocates. Using his urbane understatement as a cover, Stendhal articulates the whole world of concern to modern man. His hero's private passions and actions are significant because they partake of the interesting conflicts among the fundamental alternatives. Stendhal's unique gifts as a writer permit him to depict all of this with a perfection vouchsafed no other novelist. He proceeds at a breakneck speed, bubbling like champagne in his Rossiniesque superficiality, which is superficial only in the sense that it bathes the surface of things in the sun of the south. His story is always on the move, getting from here to there with amazing rapidity. Within a couple of pages one is already at the heart of the story and already involved with its characters.

The story of *The Red and the Black* is a simple one and was picked out of the newspapers by Stendhal and reproduced without much alteration. A young man of modest origins becomes the tutor in the home of a provincial bourgeois whose wife he seduces. He is forced to leave and ends up in Paris as the secretary of a noble whose daughter he seduces. He is denounced by his first love just when he is on the brink of great worldly advancement, goes to a church where she is praying, and shoots her. He is condemned to death and loses his head, while both of his loves plead for his life. This is the whole story of the newspapers and the novel, nothing more. There are no dissertations and none of the extraneous excitements provided by events to which we are accustomed in so many novels like Dickens' and Zola's. All the excitement, and how very exciting this story is, consists in the intimate psychology of the important characters, particularly Julien. The dangers of Julien when he is in Madame de Rênal's bedroom and his leaping out of her window are dealt with in a few compact lines and are interesting not for their melodrama but for Julien's reactions and reflections about them. Stendhal's marvelous insouciance is described with the greatest skill by Hippolyte Taine in his essay on Stendhal.⁵

The story of the tutor who debauches a woman in the home where he is employed is familiar to us from *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. Julien is different only in that he does it twice and might well have contin-

ued to do so if his career had not been cut short. In both homes he expected to further his ambition to make a great career for himself in society, but in spite of himself he makes his career as a lover, not cynically but because this is all that has real emotional force for him. He is not a great sensualist, and his two seductions were not planned. His involvement with the two exceptional women he encounters is all to his credit. No man save him in this novel has any passionate attachment to women. Love is not a vocation for the masses. The only notable successes of this young man, so avid of success and full of fantasies about it, are in the domain of love, which did not figure in any of his Napoleonic projects. And it is our old friend *amour-propre*, not love of the beautiful, that pushes him into his seductions. In both cases, he imposes a duty on himself to sleep with these women because he thinks they think they are superior to him, and, moreover, he is wounded by the humiliating servitude to persons who are merely rich or wellborn. His loves begin as acts of vengeance. His experience is not unlike that of the child Jean-Jacques, whose concern that he was despised by the Lambercier family, with whom he lived as an orphan, led to his braving the terrors of the kingdom of darkness.⁶ Inequality is the source of vice, and the motor of vice is *amour-propre*, which seeks revenge, to do harm to those who are superordinated in the management of society and who make others slaves of their opinions. This is surely a vice from the points of view of both Rousseau and Stendhal, but it also constitutes the core of the charm of the two young heroes, for theirs is, apparently due only to nature's dispensation, the version of *amour-propre* that leads to pride rather than vanity.⁷ The bourgeois husband of Julien's first love, M. de Rênal, when insulted, plots vengeance, but is always prevented from achieving it by considerations of advantage and of risk involved, whereas Jean-Jacques and Julien act foolishly and impetuously without calculation to restore their self-respect in their own eyes. Just as Jean-Jacques passed through the graveyard while thinking he was, by his daring, making himself worthy of Plutarch's Roman heroes, Julien is constantly trying to measure his deeds against his Napoleonic vision of himself. He conducts his seductions as Napoleon conducted the operations of the Grande Armée. The self-mockery of Rousseau is paralleled by Stendhal's mockery of Julien, although they both think well of their heroes. They are both extremely alienated, buffeted by their sense that they come off badly in comparison with other men, and both use literary models to distinguish themselves from the herds of sheeplike men who surround them. Nothing starts from the heart, but they

both have great hearts. They are both great reasoners about schemes for their advancement, but these schemes are comically unrealistic, and they always end up following an unexpected, even unconscious, prompting of their hearts. The task of both Rousseau and Stendhal in their sentimental education of their heroes is to make them discover the truth and beauty of love and thus cure them of their alienation. Their *amour-propre* is the engine of self-awareness that passes through a long moment of self-deception while providing their souls with the wings to take them upward toward the sublime. Stendhal's operative word is "sincerity," and he watches his little hypocrite Julien destroy the most delicious experiences because he does not yet have the courage to be sincere. Sincerity (as opposed to hypocrisy), which prior to Rousseau was a virtue testifying to quality of religious faith, becomes with him the religion of the godless subjective self. Its rituals are dedicated to inducing it to reveal itself, and its devotees seek not to be faithful to the true God with all their hearts and their minds but to be true to themselves.

This Rousseauan psychology is present in aspects of Julien's character that are rather surprising given his single-minded ambition, self-absorption, and harsh view of people's motives. He is capable of tears for the suffering poor. He is indignant, à la Rousseau, at M. Valenod's dishonest administration of the funds destined for the indigent and his mistreatment of them (I.7). Julien has the compassion of natural goodness that is lacking in the others, and Stendhal apparently is so soft as to justify Julien's extreme egotism and ambitiousness by emphasizing the unnaturalness of the society against which he struggles, a society in which hopes for justice are forlorn. Stendhal's dislike of moral pieties, which suits his themes, his tastes, and his talents, breaks down a bit in the passages that reveal Julien's compassion, along with those that show Julien's pious respect for revolutionaries and their causes. All this seems to smack of the Rousseauan sentimentalism with which Stendhal wishes to break. This intention is gainsaid by his indignation at the injustices of the new bourgeois society as well as its philistinism. Julien is interesting because he cannot play that game and thus reveals it for what it is.

Similarly, Julien's admiration of persons of single-minded dedication and high moral standards who are persecuted precisely because of their virtue is unqualified. In spite of his unbelief, he respects those who do really believe and live according to the precepts of Christianity. The two examples are priests, the Curé Chélan and the Abbé Pirard, both of whom are assigned roles akin to that of

the Savoyard Vicar. Julien's incredulity seems to have to do less with a critique of faith than with a doubt about its vitality in modernity. He anticipates Nietzsche's "God is Dead," which means that the trouble with God is not his nonexistence but his incapacity to act and motivate men in our times. Chélan and Pirard are throwbacks, and therefore not unqualified objects of imitation, but they are impressive in that they believe in *something* that affects their lives, whereas everybody else is motivated by money, and their relation to higher things is but an ineffective veneer or self-justification. For Stendhal or Julien, believing in something is more important than truth. Stendhal seems to say that a clear-sighted person who has lived the experiences of our time can believe only in passionate love. Julien, who wants to be Napoleon and who chooses the life of a priest because, in this hypocritical age, the Church is a support for the existing social order and the path to power and riches for parvenus, actually ends up being only a bedroom warrior. All of his spirituality is exhausted in his wars with the ladies, and his daring and ready wit are almost exclusively demonstrated in his descents from bedroom windows with the risks of angry husbands or parents discovering, disgracing, or killing him. These sexual escapades are compelling realities whereas all the rest is insubstantial acting, dissipated by the love game as are the morning clouds by the sun.

Even the Rousseauian opposition between city and country is preserved in Stendhal. It is striking in a writer who manifests little of the Romantic taste for nature, and who hardly pauses to describe natural settings, that Julien's moments of greatest inner freedom and exultation come when he sees the mountains and looks down over the valleys from them (I.10). This partakes of the peculiarly Rousseauian sublimation of the highest spirituality into landscapes. In Shakespeare, nature is translated into the human element and gets its dignity as it gives cosmic meaning to the aspirations and deeds of human beings. In Rousseau it is the contrary. Man is translated into nature. The human perspective is lost in empathy with the mountains, the seas, the heavens, storms, calms, etc. The experience of nature in this sense is with the capacity to experience compassion. Nature is strongly contrasted with the artificiality of a society whose chains are anything but natural. Only the love experience is truly compelling for Stendhal, but its special character comes to light in the context of a specific view of the relation between nature and society. And, although the men in the provinces can hardly be said to be more natural than those in Paris, the contrast between Mme. de Rênal and Mathilde de La Mole is founded on the perfect naturalness

of the former and the perfect artificiality of the latter. Stendhal even echoes Rousseau's attack on the corrupting effect of novels. In Paris the literary modes determine how men and women make love. Mme. de Rênal's innocence of any literary influence makes her love true and sincere because she discovers it for herself and in herself, whereas Mathilde not only reads novels but wants to be a character in one (I.7, I.13, II.11). How Rousseau and Stendhal can square this view of the effect of novels with their own vocations as novelists is a vexed question. Taken from the highest point of view, their case is not entirely dissimilar from that of Plato, who attacks writing in writing. Here one can only say that all three are conscious of a problem and respond to it by being writers of a different kind from the others.

This provides the key to the special brand of immoralism to which Stendhal is addicted. We are so used to something akin to what Stendhal presents to us that we forget how shocking it is, and, more important, how different it is from the tastes of earlier writers. Shakespeare and the Greek dramatists, for example, do not celebrate the immoral deeds of their heroes and usually end by supporting the conventional moral order, perhaps in an unconventional way. For the last two centuries our sympathies have been attached to the destroyers of the moral order, so much so that, without any awareness of what this really means, we use the word "subversive" as a synonym for art. Every bubbleheaded movie star or rock star thinks it is sufficiently impressive to describe his or her art as "subversive." Stendhal is not so foolish as to take any such description as sufficient, but he has contributed to the success of this point of view, and its deep source is in Rousseau's distinction between the moral man and the good man. Although Rousseau makes much more of morality than does Stendhal, he describes himself as a good man and not a moral man, and thereby seems to give a certain preference to goodness. In the wake of this distinction one finds a gradual degradation of morality into bourgeois morality, meaning merely the hypocritical and repressive rules of the game of a competitive and exploitative society. A sign of this change is to be found in the "Prologue in Heaven," which introduces Goethe's *Faust*, where Faust is referred to by God as a good man.⁸ He is certainly not a moral man. In so much of the literature that provides our immediate education the major characters break the moral rules, and there are no counterbalancing moral characters who indicate by their example the superiority of the moral way. It is not that earlier writers did not see that there are problems with conventional morality, but they be-

lieved that conventional morality was an imperfect reflection of true morality, and they were inclined, not merely out of concern for edifying the public, to look in the direction of a perfected morality and moral heroes for their elaboration of the most interesting human types. After Rousseau that direction appeared to be a dead end, and frankly immoral types began to epitomize the most interesting ways of life. Julien is a liar, a thief, a cheat, a seducer, an ingrate, but this does not prevent Stendhal from preferring him to everyone else in his book. All of this prefigures Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*, and Stendhal was a novelist very much to Nietzsche's taste.⁹ Goodness seems to consist in a combination of natural sentiments like compassion combined with energy of soul, and above all, sincerity. A large part of sincerity is the frank admission of the natural selfishness that conventional morality does not overcome but lies about. Machiavelli's quick-witted and daring characters provide a text for this taste, and Machiavelli's laughter becomes part of the seriousness of this new perspective on morality and human interestingness. All of modern moral and political science gets an artistic expression in these new heroes. Balzac's criminal hero Vautrin, with his strength and explosive energy, which contrast with the weakness of the social forces of justice, is another such character. What is new in the Romantic idiom is the linkage of these low motives with the highest idealism and poetry. It is Machiavellianism with a powerful erotic charge.

The corollary of this taste is an utter contempt for the classic virtue, moderation. Daring, ready wit, and even a quixotic love of justice, which are elements of the other virtues in the classical canon, remain respectable and attractive, but moderation comes to light as merely repulsive. Moderation is the most important ingredient of Socratic irony, and if irony remains at all, it is a far cry from that delicious style one discovers in Xenophon's Socrates. Moderation appears now to be equivalent to the bourgeois' careful concern for his self-preservation and avoidance of any life-threatening risks. It was always believed that men have to be willing to risk their lives for what they care about, but it never before went to the extreme that risking one's life is in itself the proof of seriousness. But that is what Mathilde de La Mole, and many fictional and non-fictional personages after her, set as the single test for lovers and other high types. Nietzsche expresses and parodies this tendency when he says a good war hallows any cause.¹⁰ Julien does worry about getting killed, but mostly out of *amour-propre*: he doesn't want his inferiors and rivals to get the better of him. This risks becoming merely a reaction to the

contemptible bourgeois version of prudence, allied as it always is with moderation. Thus reason is inevitably sacrificed to his taste, for reason, as we have already noted, is now understood to be calculating, reductionist, and destructive rather than creative of beautiful ideals. Romanticism restores imagination to the throne usurped by reason with the support of the Enlightenment's troops. Julien's reasonings are always ridiculous while his instincts are exciting and admirable. All this is a gloss on Machiavelli's dictum:

I judge this indeed, that it is better to be impetuous than cautious, because fortune is a woman; and it is necessary, if one wants to hold her down, to beat her and strike her down. And one sees that she lets herself be won more by the impetuous than by those who proceed coldly. And so always, like a woman, she is the friend of the young, because they are less cautious, more ferocious, and command her with more audacity.¹¹

One might add that this passage seems to be a complete and exhaustive interpretation of the part of *The Red and the Black* that concerns Julien's affair with Mathilde.

The preference for youth, beauty, and daring simply dominates *The Red and the Black*, which is the purest profession of Stendhal's faith, but it should be noted that in its rival, *The Charterhouse of Parma*, there is a certain qualification of this faith. In it there are two poles of interest, the romantic hero, Fabrice del Dongo, and the charming, cynical, Machiavellian political man, Mosca. He is a bit ridiculous because he is no longer young and was never beautiful and is in love with the beautiful, but past her prime, Duchess of Sanseverina, who is really in love with her nephew Fabrice, who loves someone else. In spite of this, Mosca charms by his intellect and real knowledge of life. There is a certain parallelism here to Homer's two books. In the perspective of the Trojan War, the angry young Achilles is unquestionably the most attractive figure, but in peace the wily Odysseus and his observation of the various ways of men capture our attention. I doubt that Stendhal fully worked this problem out, but Julien seems to represent the fantasy life of Stendhal, what this unprepossessing writer would like to have been like, while Mosca represents the wisdom and the insight of Julien's creator. Stendhal may have cherished a preference for his creation but he cannot suppress the creator's significance, and that creator does not quite fit into the system.

III

Stendhal leads Julien through the life of the nineteenth century that he so despises. He is elevated from his home, where he is surrounded by cruel peasants who hate this sensitive changeling, to the home of M. de Rênal, who, in the ridiculous parody of the *ancien régime* that was the restoration of Charles X, tries, out of vanity, to capture a semi-aristocratic status based on his family origins.

The regime is on its last legs. The novel is written in the light of the liberal, that is, the commercial or capitalist revolution of 1830 that brought Louis Philippe to power or, rather, to the shadow of power. The active political opponents of M. de Rênal and his newfangled reactionary party are the Liberals, who want to reform the social order in such a way as to favor their own rise to wealth. Persons like M. de Rênal try to win the distinction of those who lived and acted when throne and altar were still intact. There is a respectable aristocratic past in France, in contrast to America, and this solicits the imagination or, if you please, the snobbism of M. de Rênal and, in one way or another, everyone else on the scene. Once they have their money, they want to play at being aristocrats. They fill their future with imaginations of new and cheapened titles, distinguished ceremonial positions, and medals and sashes. He and his class live in terror of a renewal of the Revolution, expecting that their own servants will cut their throats and pillage their houses. They rely on the police and the Church to suppress the dangerous *canaille*, which threatens them with socialism.

M. de Rênal can dedicate himself to embellishing himself and his properties because he already has made his money—out of manufacture. He is, of course, distinguished from the true aristocrat because he takes these bagatelles with infinite seriousness whereas the latter, while requiring these things, as Aristotle tells us, despises them.¹² M. de Rênal is an infinitely vulgar man who thinks about the price he has paid for everything, although he is distinguished from the liberal upstart Valenod, who will tell all comers what those prices were. The Valenods, however, are more attuned to the spirit of the times and are about to win the next round, with the help of the Jesuits. Reactionary imitators like M. de Rênal affect to represent traditional culture and wish to have tutors who know Latin to educate their children. They have no interest whatsoever in the content of Latin literature but care only about the good reputation attached to the dead language. From the moment Julien arrives on the scene he is in a continuous battle of vanities with M. de Rênal, and Julien almost always gets the better of him. No real aristocrat would put

himself in a position where a youngster whom he wishes to treat as a servant continually humiliates him. The key to Julien's success in the house is M. de Rênal's fear that Julien will be hired away by M. Valenod and thus his own distinction will be lost.

After showing us M. de Rênal and his entourage of typical provincial characters with their constant intrigues, Stendhal gives us a picture of the religious establishment through Julien's stay at the seminary. Religion is still the great educator and is understood by Stendhal to be the highest expression of a culture. Its debility is the best symptom of what Stendhal thinks is wrong with nineteenth-century culture. This interlude is very much like Rousseau's account in the *Confessions* of his incarceration in a religious institution in Turin,¹³ except that Stendhal does not play upon a putative superiority of contemporary Protestantism, which he would regard as merely the dull ideology of liberalism. For him Catholicism had much more poetry and provided a better stage for the various interesting varieties of the psychology of faith and the lack thereof. Stendhal wishes to present a true history of the practice of his own time while measuring it against its highest claims for itself. He is hard on religion as almost no one is today because he has, perhaps in spite of himself, such high expectations from it.

The scene in the seminary is of interest because it presents a world with the highest moral and spiritual pretensions, whose most striking element is the unrelieved materialism of its actual life. The heavy and graceless children of peasants are there to escape the poverty of their lives and are preoccupied with the food they get in the present and, for the future, exhaust their imaginations about the comfortable functions they will fulfill when they are priests. Mere convention and opinion dominate their every thought and deed while the professors spin the blackest plots for the sake of power and influence. The seminary contains a discrete mixture of mediocrity and moral ugliness seasoned with unbelievable stupidity. The most typical priest is concerned with caring for and manipulating the dead symbols of a once potent religious impulse, the shell of which is the great churches still rising impressively above the cities, reminiscences of an omnipresence of religion hardly credible to us who have no such monuments. The body is immortal while the soul was killed by the Enlightenment and the Revolution. The fallen inheritors of this legacy calculate their survival on the basis of usefulness to the political classes while those political classes count on religion to serve as an opiate of the masses.

Stendhal's analysis differs from Marx's only in that he expects

strictly nothing from the masses. Julien is the very model of the superior man who is hated and distrusted because he does not share the motives and aspirations of those around him. He does, as I have mentioned, deeply admire the severe Abbé Pirard, who is a real believer and adheres to the strict principles of Jansenism. He is the only person in the book who has moral weight as compared with Julien. But like the old hermit in *Zarathustra*, he just hasn't heard that God is dead. Like so many nineteenth-century atheists, Stendhal is an admirer of Pascal and Port-Royal. There is an undigested element of religious extremism in them, feeding on the cult of sincerity and contempt for bourgeois materialism, rebellious against the spirit of Voltaire and the Encyclopedists, the atheists of the eighteenth century. The intense element of the soul had been forgotten and was ready to boil over. This reflects Rousseau's preference for extremism—in politics, morals, love, and religion—as over against the easy-goingness of his contemporaries. Fanatics at least believe in and care about something. Similarly, the Curé Chélan, the only decent man in Verrières, is thought to be a Jansenist. The Jesuits who are in control represent a flexible semirationalism, an ends-justifies-the-means morality, and an admixture of calculation about political possibilities with their faith. Julien's appearance in this novel in the habit of a novice represents his attempt to adapt to and master the circumstances of his time. His hypocrisy is justified by the character of that time, but his true self is present underneath that habit.

This religious interlude between the two halves of the novel—provinces versus Paris, parvenus versus aristocrats, Mme. de Rênal versus Mathilde de La Mole—is an essential part of Stendhal's sketch of the history of his time. It concludes, appropriately, with Julien's encounter with the bishop of Besançon, a true remnant of the *ancien régime*, the cultivated ecclesiastic without excess of principle, a man of perfect taste and true tolerance. He sees right through Julien while being complicit with the vicar and his cohorts who persecute Julien, all in the spirit of worldly wisdom. The bishop is the incarnation of the *disinvoltura* that delights Stendhal. He concludes his relations with Julien by giving him a magnificent edition of the pagan Tacitus, who provides an alternative account of the same period in history presented in the New Testament.

At last having arrived in Paris, we actually find the true aristocrats who have the most exquisite manners, some taste, a pride that is second nature, because at least there was a past where they had a great place, and a breadth of views unknown in the provinces. Julien is honestly seduced by the charms of the old Marquis de La Mole,

who treats him with infinite politeness, which is, on deeper reflection, an insult because it is founded on the Marquis' unassailable conviction of Julien's social inferiority. The Marquis is not a man to feel threatened by this clever and talented youngster. He only wants to make use of him; and, when he finally takes Julien's measure, he is amused by him, providing him with a blue suit that he is to wear when they are just friends, in addition to the black suit he wears when he is the Marquis' secretary. This little world with its palaces and its titles is a work of refinement developed over centuries, and the actors on its stage continue to believe that they play a central role in Europe, and hence in universal history. (Stendhal admires this world and was an enthusiastic participant in the opera, which was the preferred entertainment in it.) This aristocracy is the representative of tradition and partakes of its strengths and weaknesses. It presents a heady atmosphere to this boy from the country who perfects his manners and manages to become a man *à la mode*. He is even able to test his skills as a factotum in the political conspiracies. This is an excellent education, but it is all too easily learned, and once he is the master of the Parisian ways, he still remains without anything significant to do. The prospects of a bishopric or even, finally, a dukedom fail to satisfy his quest for something important to do. Although from the point of view of the social hierarchy, he remains a man of the lower class, he has all the natural gifts that would allow him entry into the highest aristocracy. But when he gets a clear look at the world of Paris, he recognizes that it is tainted by the furious vanity of fashion and the quasi-impossibility of sincerity. This is a diminished scene, not one to satisfy an ambition like Julien's. The Marquis and his friends have become a part of the money world, as has everyone else, and their powerlessness as aristocrats has culminated, except for a few halfhearted political conspiracies, in the boring routine of a high society that has no true vocation and lacks all firmness of soul. Napoleon, always Julien's hero, represented a vital new beginning in which individual greatness and great politics seemed for an illusory moment to be possible in modernity. In the end the depiction of Paris here is nothing but a rerun of Rousseau's, though presented in Stendhal's elegant idiom. Julien's stay in Paris is like Emile's. Each completes his education there, protected against its corruptions by the presence of a high ideal that makes him more of an observer than a participant. Julien, however, unlike Emile, has the misfortune of meeting a woman in Paris who appears worthy of his attention.

IV

And now we must turn to the two women who together constitute the whole of Julien's sexual experience as well as the real excitement of this novel. Each is truly extraordinary, standing far above the world in which she is placed. Like every single good person in *The Red and the Black*, they are both irresistibly attracted to this beautiful and singular, but absolutely selfish, young man. They join the Curé Chélan, Abbé Pirard, Marquis de La Mole, and Prince Korasof in this strange, supramoral fascination. Each woman represents one of the two kinds of love Stendhal distinguishes in the novel, Mme. de Rênal, heart-love, and Mathilde, head-love. Mme. de Rênal is true love, without tincture of *amour-propre* and the role playing that accompanies it, whereas Mathilde is a potent actress, taking as her role the reenactment of the most vigorous moments of French history. Julien, of course, brings his overdose of *amour-propre* to both affairs, but with Mme. de Rênal there is the possibility of immediate sentimental union, whereas with Mathilde the entire mechanism is the fevered imagination and the alternation of mastery and slavery. To contemporary readers, Mme. de Rênal is the stereotype of the submissive woman, passively accepting the role assigned to her by a male-dominated society, whereas the proud and rebellious Mathilde seems to represent the possibility of liberation. In fact, neither Mme. de Rênal nor Mathilde is a promising candidate for liberation because their whole being and the meaning of their lives are involved with the existence of a man such as Julien. Mme. de Rênal's superiority consists precisely in the unalloyed naturalness of this vocation in her. Our difference in perspective on these characters is the single most revealing sign of the distance between us and Stendhal, although he is in so many ways a modern just like us. He knew that the relations between the sexes had become boring.

Stendhal uses as the epigraph for one chapter a quote from Barnave: "So this is the beautiful miracle of your civilization! You have made an ordinary business out of love" (II.31). What he admires is either a thing of the past or a theme of novels for the happy few, but he uses all of his art to convince us that the only interesting life is the one dominated by *amour-passion*, that of men and women living for each other, supported by shame, modesty, and idealization of the sexual act. Nothing of the interesting relationships Stendhal depicts would be possible for women for whom the sexual act is not a matter of life and death and sacred honor. These relationships, constructed like the most complicated movements of great old watches, have as their mainspring the conviction that the gift of the body comes from grace of the whole soul, and these special connections are given to

Julien alone against all counsels of prudence and in an act of overcoming the will. Each gives herself to Julien with a fair degree of ease in the circumstances and rather shamelessly, but in the conviction that the overpowering love they experience is itself the standard for good and evil. Their passions are natural, especially in the case of Mme. de Rênal, but so in another sense are the conventions that forbid them to have or indulge such passions. They live in societies where what they do is condemned, and necessarily so. For these women, their giving themselves necessarily entails civil death, a banishment from society, unlike the hypocritical affairs of ordinary adulteresses. Each of these women is heroic in her utter abandon, which is a kind of social suicide for the sake of the imperious demand of her attraction. Neither Mme. de Rênal nor Mathilde could hope to hide her involvement with Julien for very long, whereas Julien could easily hide his involvement, and for a man the consequences are much more benign in any event. The loosening of bourgeois morals in the generations after Stendhal did not so much make life easier for lovers as destroy the conditions of love. This is what is anticipated in the quote from Barnave. Love is really the business of "the happy few."

In Stendhal, a man who surely knew all the physical charms of sex, there is almost no description of them. Stendhal's descriptions of the act itself do not go beyond remarks like "when Julien left Mme. de Rênal's room, it could have been said, in novelistic style, that he had nothing more to desire," or "she had nothing more to refuse him" (I.15). Stendhal's reticence is not in any sense prudishness, although an earlier literature that was coarser could speak more openly, perhaps because it believed less in love. In Shakespeare, both modes are present, but certainly most of his loves (Cleopatra's is the great exception) seem to support Stendhal's way. This reticence is due partly to Stendhal's agreement with Rousseau that the illusions of love and the interesting psychological effects of the illusions are far more important than the act of love itself. But it also has to do with the fact that the physical details of the act, reproduced in pictures or words, are not what the sexual act really is for those who participate in it, for their imaginations are engaged with their specific relationship, and mere spectators cannot see this. Everything is in the sentiments leading up to the bodily act and following upon it, the attractions and repulsions connected with this fulfillment, and the spiritual exaltations and excesses surrounding what is in the world of nature the most banal and ordinary satisfaction. This is what is wrong with pornography. It distorts and impoverishes sensuality. Stendhal wants his readers to imagine, after he has seduced them into becom-

ing lovers of his personages, what they do together, so that they themselves can be accomplices in the romantic illusion. Stendhal believed that his descriptions would be much more sexually exciting to his readers of choice than any explicit depiction could ever be. The reader has to contribute, if he is to be a participant in the novelistic description. Far from being hampered by the various kinds of imagination, the sexual act is nurtured by them.

None of this is meant to gainsay the fact that much of what Stendhal hints about Julien's sexual experiences indicates that he, like so many other men and women, rarely really enjoys sex because he is thinking about other things while doing it, or is, not to put too fine a point on it, worried about how he looks to his beloved or to a watching world. But this is all part of the story of love, and Julien ends up by being cured.

Moreover, the wild and misguided *amour-propre* that Julien brings to his relationships with women is not simply a vice. Without it there would be no relationship. One has to worry about what the other party thinks, and that is difficult, if not impossible, to know. *Amour-propre* is, to repeat, the instrument of human sociality because it is the part of us concerned with others' wills. The imperious need to subjugate another's will leads to many perversions, because every ounce of one's self-esteem depends on success in the venture. And, as all the searing complaints of jealous men and women tell us, there seems to be no way to predict or control the esteem that is necessary for our self-esteem. Will can overcome our desires, but it cannot make us sexually attractive. The seduction of another's desire can easily become an end in itself, therefore culminating in contempt or at least loss of interest in the one who is conquered, and in simple self-hatred when one fails. Further, the demands of *amour-propre* in love relationships escalate, so that one wants the other not only to respond but to respond to what one really is, truly and sincerely. The game is ever more subtle and the truth of the relationship is difficult to determine. And there is so much pain in all of this that *amour-propre* must constantly prepare safety nets so that desperate doubt does not send us into an abyss. Self-protective interpretations distort the truth of the affair. Finally, one begins to wonder how there can ever be a reciprocity of affection, mutual and sincere admiration, without each of the parties misinterpreting and using the other. But these are the facts, perhaps sad facts, about the difficulty of human relationships. How much simpler isolation or frank acceptance that one is just using others would be. Love is the no-man's-land, studied with mines, between these alternatives. The true meaning of the

civilized sexual act is that one has successfully navigated this mine-field.

But the fact of this book is that Mme. de Rênal is naturally and wholly in love with Julien, without reflection and without second thoughts. Her inclination is everything a man could ask for. Julien's problem is double: he has to persuade himself both that Mme. de Rênal's attachment is really like this and that he reciprocates and can get his satisfaction in the calm acceptance of a love that excludes so many others and so many objects of ambition.

Mme. de Rênal is an innocent even though she is a product of and lives within a very corrupt society. She is so indifferent to the charms which attract the other provincials that she is proof against their influence. It is as though she were sleepwalking, and only her accidental meeting with Julien awakens her and brings to the surface the depths of passion hidden beneath what appears to be a perfect calm. Her imagination is not inflamed, and she alone is able to have immediate enjoyment without fantasies that surely embellish affairs but that also mean that one is enjoying the fantasy and not the reality. She is, of course, not a natural savage, which means she has her share of *amour-propre* and imagination, but hers is the kind that Rousseau prescribes for Sophie and Emile, so that her worry about the opinions of others concerns only Julien's opinion, and her imagination embellishes her own situation rather than imitating other persons'. Julien is always calling the whole world to witness everything he does, particularly the inner witness he has constructed for himself. If Mme. de Rênal had read novels, she would have been way out ahead about what really happens in her relation with Julien and would have been deprived of the deliciousness of the experiences, which she would have interpreted prior to having them. She is a natural, but she is also something of an aristocrat, with a great inheritance in prospect. Her education—for Stendhal education is of the essence for knowing what a person is—was the typical convent education that did not in any way attach the young girls' sensuality to a true religious experience but taught a conventional and routine piety. It left her untouched, and its failings were compounded by the fact that she was treated with the greatest respect by the nuns because she was an heiress. She did not experience contempt for those around her, but her aristocratic superiority was expressed by her indifference to them.

Mme. de Rênal is the archetypical Romantic heroine in her innocence, her unpretentious high-mindedness, and her unalloyed femininity. A woman in one of my classes once exclaimed, "She's

nothing but a cow!" And it could look this way to persons for whom the sentimental life is a drag or too much of a burden, but Mme. de Rênal is capable of the tenderest and most passionate relationship. One wonders how long a couple could go on like this, but that is not such a problem. Stendhal thinks this experience is worth it, no matter how brief. Julien has only a few days to enjoy the perfectly unself-conscious love of Mme. de Rênal, and Fabrice del Dongo's Clélia dies after only three years of a furtive affair. Unlike Rousseau, Stendhal does not think of marriage and family but concentrates only on the love affair of two partners, which is, in spite of its claims, of short duration. The intense episode is preferred to the calm of the philosopher or the security looked for by the bourgeois.

Mme. de Rênal is the typical Romantic heroine also in that she is a married woman whose marriage is loveless but who is very capable of love. When she encounters a man she can love, she is caught in the conflict between duty and love. This is an endlessly interesting situation for people who take both marriage and love seriously and it provided the theme for the literature to which the bourgeoisie was addicted well into the twentieth century. Mme. de Rênal and her kind cannot be blamed because they had no idea of what love is when they married and took marriage to be a social institution into which one enters for good and prudent reasons. The assumption is that love, passionate, physical love, is a very good and important thing. If this does not justify adultery it at least makes us sympathetic to the sinner.

She is, like Julie, above all a mother. Her deeply felt obligations to her children split her between them and Julien. Julien enters her life by way of her children and almost as a substitute father to them. When she gets to know him she wishes he were the father of her children. This not only gives her heart the excuse for occupying itself with him but allows it to formulate the sophistry that her love of him is part of her love of them. In spite of her having been married for a dozen years, Mme. de Rênal is to all intents and purposes a virgin. The experience of sex with her husband has left her utterly unmoved. It is part of the social convention of marriage, even though it has resulted in the very natural product of her sons. This merely serves to underline the difference between love and motherhood, which is for Mme. de Rênal the major contradiction produced by civilization. She never succeeds in resolving this contradiction, although her behavior with respect to both elements of it is tragically noble. Her husband simply has no substantial existence for her. She doesn't hate him, and her adultery serves only to bring to light the

fact that he was never anything real for her. He is as crude in his relation to women as he is to everything and everyone else. He is used to her and counts on her, but he has taken her for granted and is incapable of understanding or sympathizing with the movements of her soul. In a recapitulation of the human relations of the bourgeoisie in general, she is for him the other who remains intransigently the other, whereas love is the story of the other becoming one's own or one's self. His sufferings are only comic and are themselves a justification for her adultery. He thinks about having a duel, which Julien would have agreed to in an instant, but after thinking it through decides that it would be imprudent. The appearance of prudence covers over the fact of cowardice. He cannot send her away because that would compromise the inheritance from her rich aunt. He is really very unhappy, but the ways of his unhappiness are contemptible and ridiculous. Stendhal stacks the deck in favor of Mme. de Rênal's adultery. He underlines the fact that she is an adulteress by making us always think of her as Mme. de Rênal, while Mathilde is always Mathilde, and Julien always Julien. We learn that her Christian or intimate name is Louise only when Stendhal lets us enter the mind of M. de Rênal, who reflects that he is very used to Louise (I.21). She is always clad in the respectability of marriage, even and especially when she is committing adultery.

As Mme. de Rênal comes to admire Julien more and more she knows only delight and pleasure. Her little bit of *amour-propre* expresses itself when she finds out that her servant Elisa loves Julien and she fears that Julien may reciprocate. This *amour-propre* deceives her into thinking she is performing a disinterested deed when she offers to aid Elisa in her hopes for Julien. Thus *amour-propre* assists in making her aware that she loves and in adding value to Julien's love. She suddenly asks herself, "Is it possible that I am in love . . . ?" (I.8). Then one night while tossing in her sleep she is struck by the frightful word "adultery," prior to the actual event (I.11). As Taine points out, the mere word, a kind of abstraction, terrifies her and changes the whole meaning of what is going on in her heart.¹⁴ It never stops what is going on there. It doesn't even poison her affections. When she is with Julien she is purely and wholly in love with him, but this word fractures the unity of her being, while it also deepens the love and its significance. The detailed depiction of this psychology is where Stendhal excels, and it is what interests him most. If one does not have or has lost the taste for such examination, Stendhal's book becomes a hollow shell, at best a tame story of adventure. For a real psychologist, which is what Nietzsche thinks Stendhal is in the high-

est degree, his novels are endlessly fascinating because they observe these phenomena with precision and without interpretive abstraction. The loss of this taste accounts, at least in part, for critics' need to look to all kinds of external things in order to keep in business. They want to teach Stendhal their boring science because they are deaf to the fascination of all he has to teach us.

Mme. de Rênal goes through the motions of resisting Julien at his first approaches, but this is mere habitual behavior, appropriate to her position as the proper wife of the mayor of Verrières, and her resistance rapidly melts. One never doubts that she will give in or that she will be faithful to her choice. Her token resistance, somewhat reinforced by doubts about Julien's seriousness, disappears rapidly because she is so sure of her instincts. This woman, who appears so passive and gentle, evinces the daring and the firmness of a general when she is involved in her affair and needs to protect Julien, her children, and herself. There is no weakness, and she behaves perfectly. She has no more bad conscience about deceiving her husband in these circumstances than does a general about deceiving an enemy. Her reaction to the anonymous letters that denounce her is quick-witted and subtle. All of this is a surprise to us and to her.

The affair's vulnerability comes from Mme. de Rênal's attachment to her children, that other pole of her nature. When the eldest of her sons gets sick she is overcome with guilt and terror, fearing that this is punishment, divine punishment, for her adultery. The tension between her love and her children is expressed in her religious terrors. This tension is the most essential characteristic of female psychology in Stendhal's world. The love of her children is very real but also relatively feeble compared with the total passion she has for Julien. She experiences no need to reinforce her sentiments toward her husband, but her concern for her children does require this religious supplement. This is exactly the same mechanism that was at work with Julie when she covered over her love of Saint-Preux with worry about her husband's atheism. In the actual presence of Julien she is completely his and confident in what she does, although she does not forget her children. In another twist on the status of children with respect to the erotic life, Julien at the very end wants Mme. de Rênal to be the real mother of his child, with whom Mathilde is pregnant. The child who naturally belongs to the individual who bears it apparently should really belong to the one with whom one is in love. This is what nature should want, if the law of love is believed to be primary. Goethe plays on this theme with great delicacy in

Elective Affinities when husband and wife, who are each in love with someone else, make love, or make-believe love, with their true loves in mind. The child who results from the act resembles the true loves who were imagined during it.¹⁵

Mme. de Rênal's religion is most powerful when she must do without Julien. She is no longer able to return to her pre-Julien routine, so only a life of dedication to religious duty and consolation can maintain her without Julien. Although she has faith in her faith during these periods, the mere presence of Julien suffices to dispel all that. During the time when Julien is in the seminary and cannot communicate with her, she devotes herself to religious practice. But an impromptu visit by Julien late in the night encounters only *pro forma* resistance, although that resistance is almost too much for the eager Julien. He always deprives the poor woman of her self-deceptions that make it more or less possible for her to exist without him. But one is not sure whether this cruelty is so awful, because she is at her best when she is loving Julien.

Julien makes love to this prodigy in ridiculous ways appropriate to his proud nature. He meets her and says, as it were, to himself, "This means war." He conducts his seduction as Napoleon conducted his battles, and he issues bulletins to himself. He begins his attachment to her out of revenge against her husband's superior position and gradually moves closer to her out of revenge for what he takes to be her belief that she is superior to him. M. de Rênal does wish to humiliate Julien because he thinks such behavior is aristocratic. (The real aristocrats humiliate Julien without meaning to do so, although Julien always sees slights as intended.) Julien imagines putting himself in the position of being rebuffed and then actually being rebuffed. He plots real revenge in response to this humiliation that exists only in his imagination. Self-respect is his only motive, and he has absolutely no interest in the love of Mme. de Rênal. Because he has such a need to keep his defensive forces on the alert, he cannot permit himself any trust in the enemy. He misinterprets almost every signal she gives him. He makes holding her hand a duty. Hours of anxiety and fear precede his grasping the forbidden hand, and his only interest is whether he will have the courage to do so. He owes it to his Roman character to do this. Again, when the moment has come, his great interest is whether he will be able to fulfill his project by taking the ladder and climbing up to the room. His intrepidity, which is the half-false variety founded on his *amour-propre*, is in stark contrast with hers, which is set in motion without doubt or hesitation simply because of the supreme value for her of

their being together. All of this is high comedy as presented by Stendhal. Julien has moments, when he calms down a bit as a result of his habitual intercourse with her, when he is actually present in the love affair without making it into a war. But these moments are short-lived, and he is always ready to go off to new adventures that will further his Napoleonic ambition. When he returns for the one night after leaving the seminary on his way to Paris, his adventure is fueled by the desire to reassert himself over the powers of religion. It takes him a couple of hours to break down her resistance. Stendhal points out that if she had acceded to his requests a little earlier, he would have enjoyed the lovemaking. But it took too long and again the whole business became an issue of the vanity of winning instead of the pleasure of being together.

Julien's silliness does not lead simply to a negative evaluation of him. He does have an element of Don Quixote in him, but the comedy is that of the talented upstart in a world where there are no longer roles for his talent. Stendhal laughs through his tears and suggests that Julien would have put it all in place if he had lived longer and healed his wounded *amour-propre*. Yet that *amour-propre* is the source of what is best about him. Stendhal appears unable to depict a fully ripe man. Successful maturity is doubtful for him, and he may in this reflect a problem with the Romantic mood altogether. As the Marquis de La Mole, no mean observer of men, says, Julien responded to his condition not by seeking petty advantage but by asserting himself against contempt, real or imagined. Thus, while being the slave of these others who might despise him, he insists on himself, on his own dignity, on what is within him and what he owes himself. At the very end he regards his peculiar merit, the quality that saves him from being a nothing, to be the law of *duty* that he has imposed on himself. This is his characteristic form of *amour-propre* and an illustration of Rousseau's ideas of soul construction. Ultimately, Rousseau hoped that this formation of the idea of duty would become independent of the slights of others in which it began, and Stendhal's admiration for Julien's character echoes this hope. The man who bases his action precisely on rejection of petty desires and petty fears is the antibourgeois.

The comic side of Julien is represented by his encounter with a bully in a bar in Besançon, who challenges Julien by looking at him. It does not come to a fight or a duel, but Julien senses himself to have been humiliated, a condition that endures for more than a year. This bully is a low type who should not engage the vanity of a gentleman and with whom a gentleman would refuse to fight. Julien runs into

him again in the street in Paris, challenges him to a duel, and takes his card. When he goes for the ritual visit with his second, he finds that the name and address on the card are those of a fatuous young diplomat whose servant the bully turns out to be. So Julien has to have a parody of a duel with the master. The servant is dismissed by his master and is beaten by Julien, who is then wounded in the duel and becomes the friend and companion of the man who wounds him. The whole business of dueling is a now absurd remnant of the *ancien régime*.¹⁶ There is not enough vitality in the idea of honor to justify it, although the decent Marquis de Croisenois dies in a duel in defense of Mathilde's lost honor. Once Julien is able to put his Besançon antagonist in his proper place, he never thinks about him again. But this haughty will to assert his natural place against the insults of the conventional world remains the central aspect of his soul. We are a step away from the triumph of the will. His capacity to experience love can emerge only when he is definitively cured of this feverish *amour-propre*, but it is the condition for his tasting true love, which itself is free of this struggle.

By contrast, without that true love, the relation between Julien and his Parisian love, Mathilde de La Mole, consists entirely of *amour-propre*. If Stendhal didn't carry this episode off with such wit, it would be the stuff of Hollywood melodrama, the provincial who arrives on the great stage and immediately has a love affair with the greatest and apparently most unattainable of stars, in this case, the richest, the noblest, and most beautiful of Parisian women. Their epic struggle is framed by the fact that she is condescending to him and he appears to be social climbing. Neither can accept the indignity of this disproportion in their social positions. Mathilde, of course, unlike Julien, has everything and need not aspire to anything in the real world around her. She is bored, and it is this boredom that expresses the ultimate situation of man in the nineteenth century. Julien is too busy climbing the ladder to be bored, but Mathilde, who is born on its highest rung, is able to survey the scene and recognize that, once there, nothing is worth doing. Boredom had become a theme of French literature in the seventeenth century with Pascal's account of it as the special experience of the man without God. Nothing is left to do in a world whose beautiful surface has been dissolved by the rational criticism of the Cartesian *cogito*. The life of such a man alternates between furious, self-forgetting activity and boredom, which homogenizes everything on the outside and makes nothing appear to be worthy of concern. This is the strand in French thought that counters the Enlightenment and its optimistic this-

worldly concerns. Pascal is the genius invoked by nineteenth-century French literature in its antipoetic Enlightenment science and politics. But what is striking about Stendhal and many other Romantics is that they adopt Pascal's analysis without the radical religious faith that made it possible. For Pascal it is the absence of God for those who are hungry for Him that is the source of their boredom. Only the presence of that hunger makes it clear that the ordinary food of the soul does not nourish. But Stendhal denies that there is or ever was a God. A nothingness becomes the standard for the judgment of the world. Longing, not the object of longing, is his standard for such judgment. The emptiness at the top haunts this literature. Stendhal tries to fill this emptiness with love or poetic creation.

The impoverishment of Mathilde's world comes to light by way of her imagination of a world where there were real men and real lovers, willing to die for their causes and their beloveds. Her criticism is simply the old refrain: what's wrong with the bourgeoisie, above all, is the absence of anything to die for or the willingness to die. Willingness to die is the touchstone for her and is her great mystery. Her boredom seeks drama, which would permit self-forgetting. The historical epoch to which she attaches herself, her novel, is the age of Henri III, which was indeed the peak of French vigor, the moment of the religious wars where faith was still compelling enough to fight about. This was also close to the moment of the Fronde, when proud, independent aristocrats still could rebel against the creeping absolutism of the monarchy. Aristocrats were aristocrats then and kings were kings, which neither are now. One of her ancestors was the lover of a queen and was put to death because of his participation in a conspiracy. This was a stage worth acting on; and, although Mathilde's imagination injects too much of the romantic element into the great theological and political issues of that day, that element was certainly present in France more than in other countries. The proud and willful girl makes a cult of this family tradition, and each year she celebrates the anniversary of her ancestor's execution and forces the family to play along, using the antique names for her various relatives. The nineteenth century as presented here through Mathilde's eyes is the careful, self-protective moment of the bourgeoisie, prior to the spurious corrective of bohemianism and the even later attempt of the bourgeoisie itself to be bohemian. Stendhal would, I believe, say that the fundamental motives are revealed in this earliest stage and that what came later was elaborate deception and self-deception.

There is no moment when Mathilde simply sees someone and

loves or hates him. Everybody must pass through her internal casting bureau in order to see whether he fits a role in the play she produces. This casting is the framework in which her relationship with Julien evolves. At first he is a matter of no more interest than any servant to her, and he thinks that she is really unattractive in her haughtiness. Then she notices his firm heroic stance when she hears him talking about politics. Her first reflection is that this is not a man born on his knees. The two previously had a certain union of taste, both filching volumes of Voltaire from the Marquis' library, the notorious Voltaire, forbidden in Julien's seminary and Mathilde's convent as well as by the public opinion of the Bourbon restoration. Unlike Mme. de Rênal, both Julien and Mathilde are readers, and readers who read essential books. Her first attraction to Julien occurs in the context of his relationship to the Count d'Altamira, who is the leader of a conspiracy to overthrow the monarchy of Naples and is under sentence of death. That makes Altamira interesting too. Julien certainly is attracted by him, and his discussion with Altamira makes him forget the mannequins who inhabit the Marquis' salon. But Altamira's attractiveness for Mathilde is ruined by the fact that he is a Liberal, which means that his standard is *utility*, the last thing Mathilde wants. She would want a revolution against utility, in which one sacrificed one's life for the *beau geste* alone.

Perhaps it should be added that the Count d'Altamira is apparently not very good-looking, whereas Julien is exceptionally beautiful. Mathilde would not see it in this way. Julien's good looks would have to be an expression of his proud rebellious soul for her, but that soul would probably be uninteresting to her if it did not come in such a body. Of course Mathilde has to think about how she could square an affair with Julien with her grand sense of her position. She engages in a great deal of sophistry with herself about natural aristocracy and the possibility of raising Julien in the social order. All of this fantasizing is an essential part of the passion that is developing. Its gestation is furthered by Julien's apparent indifference to her, which makes him a special challenge. How dare this *roturier* be indifferent to such a great lady? Julien, on his side, thinks he has no interest in her, but he is really preoccupied with the improbability of such a great lady's being interested in him or, if she were, the probability of her merely playing with him. His sensitive vanity furthers the romance because he appears to manifest a noble indifference, something worth the effort to combat. Thus, mutual misunderstanding is the stuff on which imagination and *amour-propre* feed. When the involvement reaches its culmination, the immediate response of this

girl is, "How could I have done such a thing with such a low person?" The release of sexual tension puts Julien, not precisely back into perspective, but into another false perspective. Then she hates and wounds him to the extent of her appreciable gifts at doing so. This leads to a scene in the Marquis' library where Julien pulls an antique knife from its scabbard and threatens to kill her. She is ravished by this sign of affection. There follows another great night together, this time with the drama continuing after the act. Julien, disappearing, as is his wont, through the window and down the ladder, receives a huge lock of his mistress's hair, which is thrown after him. This permits Mathilde to use her art of doing up her hair in such a way as to hide what she has done from her family while providing an exciting secret understanding between Julien and herself. Piquancy is added by a certain desire to be discovered and to flaunt the conventions openly. These are the kinds of things that fuel the mad passions essential to her.

The fact is that the entire affair between these two strange persons is an erotic version of the dialectic of master and slave. When she is up, he is down, and vice versa. It is a struggle for mastery over another's desires, and as in all such conquests, the interest is only in the acquisition, not in the enjoyment of what has been acquired. Each seeks the validation of his or her worth by another who is a worthy judge. The problem is that as soon as this other has capitulated, he or she is no longer a worthy judge. The capitulation proves weakness, and the struggle comes up empty. The only things that keep this affair going are the counterattacks of the apparently defeated enemy and the need to come back to the charge in order to make the conquest final. In this war no prisoners are taken and the psychological cruelties are barbaric. Julien goes through the most extreme sufferings, where he accepts her negative judgments as definitive and true evaluations of his small worth. He lives entirely in the capricious movements of her soul. This is exquisite torture and as extreme an alienation as can be imagined. Life is drained of all content except obsessive reflection about what has happened and how he can restore himself. This too is a variety of love. No one can doubt the connectedness here, but there is no moment of true reciprocity or enjoyment of each other for what each really is.

Finally, Julien explicitly recognizes that he must *subjugate* Mathilde. He restores himself in one of Stendhal's great comic inventions, paralleled only by Fabrice del Dongo's sermons as archbishop of Parma in which he makes love to Clélia. A wild Russian suggests that he court the prudish and ridiculously snobbish wife of

a field marshal in order to make Mathilde jealous and provides a packet of ready-made love letters written by a Russian friend in an attempted seduction of an English lady. Julien sends these letters off daily, sometimes forgetting to change London to Paris in them or to perform any of the other alterations necessary to make the letters appropriate. He does not bother reading the responses. He coolly tortures Mathilde, who is reengaged by his indifference and the appearance of an apparent rival on the stage. Mathilde loses all dignity, sidling up to Julien in the salon to hear what he is saying to the field marshal's wife. By a great act of will and the aid of the ready-made battle plan of the Russian, he for the moment brings her back to heel. This is when he begins using the word "subjugation" and asks for guarantees. The final guarantee that Mathilde offers is her pregnancy, which means that she has sacrificed everything to him.

This affair might well today be characterized as sadomasochistic. And this language would not be completely groundless if one stripped it of its perverse and pseudoscientific overtones. The Marquis de Sade, who wrote not long before this time, seemed to think that the most intense pleasure was the pain one could cause another, and used the sexual excitement he hoped to generate as an excuse for sermonizing about alienated social relations. There seems to be a certain advantage contained in relations of pain in a world where it is doubtful whether pleasures can be social or shared. This doubt seems justified in the gentler sexual activities, but there is no doubt in the mind of someone who causes pain that his screaming victim is relating to him. It is also true that the passive partner is gratified by the real interest expressed by the active one in his torture. Sadomasochism is a peculiarly modern form of lovemaking. The elaborate and absurd rituals that often accompany sadomasochistic relations as they are practiced today indicate that this is where we now find the free play of imagination in erotic encounters and almost the only place where ritual is still alive. Although I would not deny the possibility that there were such experiences among men and women in earlier ages, I doubt they were very central. I am inclined to think that sadomasochism achieves its new power only at a time when the possibility of love based on nature has become doubtful. It is an eroticization of the will and the peculiar pleasures of its exercise in imposing order on a chaotic world. Merely labeling sadism and masochism as a perversion does not deal with the existential situation underlying them. Nature, homogenized, no longer authorizes relations of sub- and superordination, nor does free consent or convention. Rank order is constituted merely by the will and the force the

will can generate. The stronger will wills the weaker will's willing to be formed and put into an order. This is the struggle between form and matter when form no longer naturally informs matter. Stendhal is not a follower of Sade, but he does depict powerfully, attractively, and amusingly a love whose content is entirely provided by *amour-propre*, the desire for primacy. He offers an alternative in the love of Mme. de Rênal, but if there is no Mme. de Rênal, one has to make do with Mathilde. Just as she longs for the willingness to die without much consideration of that for which one dies, she admires the pure will of the one who is able to dominate her. The absence of men who care enough to enter into this struggle is an abiding theme of much Romantic literature. The distinction between seduction and force, both based upon man's superior strength, begins to disappear, and leads to Nietzsche's dictum, "Are you going to women? Don't forget the whip."¹⁷ In sum, when the will to power has become our metaphysics, love becomes a derivative expression of power.

When Julien is winning his war with Mathilde, after getting the habit of the ups and downs of the relationship and before he has a chance to become bored and contemptuous in his turn, he develops a certain real affection for this spirited girl and her passion to play a role in the human comedy. But there is little time for such self-aware affection, and it is not, in any event, substantial enough to sustain itself. Almost immediately, she is lifting him to the heights, arranging a brilliant military and diplomatic career, and presenting him with what he assumes will be a son to be an heir to his achievements. He is on the verge of a dukedom, his natural father being declared not to be his father while he becomes the son of an old duke, a status fitting his nature. This is the peak of what the nineteenth century can offer to ambition, but for him it is also the peak of alienation; he lives the actualization of dreams that arose out of envy.

Just at the moment of fulfillment, as he approaches the sun in his winged chariot, he is shot down by his old provincial love. The denouement of this novel is induced by Mme. de Rênal's piety. Julien has disappeared in the vortex of Parisian life, and she has returned to her remorseful observance. He has the gall to suggest that she be a reference for him to the Marquis de La Mole, who is deciding whether to accept Julien as a son-in-law for his daughter. Under the direction of her scheming confessor, who is trying to make a reputation for himself, Mme. de Rênal writes a letter, not utterly counterfactual, accusing Julien of moving into households and using the women in them to further his ambition. Julien, in a rage, goes and shoots her in church. But by his attempted murder he purges

himself of his *amour-propre* and the indignation that defends it. The only person whom this hero actually shoots in the novel is a praying woman. She of course repents her religious excess and returns to her true religion, Julien. Everything about the piety of this woman is said by her confessor: she is in love with Julien and calls it remorse. This is all a very curious and interesting commentary on competition between religion and eroticism for the spiritual energy of the human soul. Which of the two is more real and more satisfying is obvious. Finally, Julien recognizes that what he regarded as only an episode or a stepping-stone was and is the thing in itself. The very being together, the total absorption in each other, is now accompanied by the awareness that this is sufficient happiness because he has had the experiences that prove its worth. Poor Mathilde is reduced to her true proportions. False love is destroyed by true love. With her, no such being together is possible. Without any ill will or any involvement of vanity, he is convinced that she will go on to others and another life, whereas with Mme. de Rênal and him this is all there is. Their senses of their own existence depend on each other without any contradiction between them. One might say, as Julien sometimes does in prison, that he has ruined his life by his incapacity to recognize this. But Stendhal appears to suggest that the few days of perfect harmony between Julien and Mme. de Rênal are enough to judge their lives happy. Similarly, the death of Julien at twenty-three might seem to be tragic, cutting off a life before it has begun, but again, Stendhal suggests that Julien has had the most important experiences and that no sequel could live up to the richness of what he has done with his life and its conclusion. Intensity is ever so much more important than duration, and no adult bourgeois life is anything but duration. Julien imitates Socrates, Boethius, and many others who proved that happiness can be completed in a prison. They demonstrated the power and the consolation of philosophy. Julien demonstrates the power and consolation of love. This is Stendhal's legacy.

In prison Julien goes through many hesitations, doubts, and reversals of sentiment and opinion. He continues to worry about what men will think of him. His speech in the court is a mixture of bravado and pathetic complaint about the injustice to the poor in conventional political orders. Terror of death assaults him, and he wonders whether the law of firmness he has prescribed to himself will suffice to overcome this animal instinct and permit him to go proudly to his execution. But amid all of this confusion, the presence of Mme. de Rênal conquers, and he dies with the same gay abandon with which

he lived when he was at his best. His love gives him a little touch of eternity when there is no other eternity for him. Mathilde, like the queen of Navarre, gets his head after bribing the craven priests who are in charge of death and its public interpretation. She buries him in a grotto with suitable pageantry and establishes a shrine for a cult dedicated to this great lover. Three days after Julien's execution, Mme. de Rênal, who is not jealous of Mathilde and needs no aping of sacred ceremony for the public expression of her love, for whom the only witness is Julien, simply dies with the thought of Julien and in the presence of her children, the only two things that had any reality for her and which express the problem of a human life for a good woman. The end of the two lovers is sad but also somehow sweet and heartening. The utter despair we find in *Madame Bovary* is not to be found here.

Julien and Mme. de Rênal did find each other in spite of the thickets of propriety and convention. This is Stendhal's response to any suspicions that human existence is futile.